**Essay topics on Mengzi**

Arts One, Seeing and Knowing, Fall 2016

1. What constitutes wisdom for Mengzi? To what extent is it grounded in, or constrained by, consistent rules that apply in the same way to all people in all contexts, and to what extent is it dependent on the character of an individual?

2. Compare/contrast the nature of political leadership in the view of Mengzi with one of (1) Plato’s *Republic* or (2) Sophocles’s *Oedipus the King*.

3. In *The Essential Mengzi*, Mengzi and others often tell stories about specific people as a way to make arguments. What value or effect might it have to express philosophical claims and arguments through telling stories in this way?

4. What is Mengzi’s view of “human nature,” and how does it differ from the definitions of “human nature” offered by one or two other theorists in the text (e.g., Yang Zhu, Mozi, Gaozi)? Why, given your understanding of Mengzi’s views, do you think these particular alternative views are presented, and how does doing so frame Mengzi’s own conception of human nature?

5. Mengzi says that the human capacity for goodness is rooted in our nature. How might he respond to the possible objection that evil is equally grounded in our nature?

6. Seen from a literary perspective, *The Essential Mengzi* might be described as a kind of hybrid text in its use of a number of different authorial voices. How do the different voices in the text (Mengzi, the editor, Zhu Xi, and any others you might wish to focus on) interact with each other and how do they affect our engagement with or understanding of the text?

7. Using evidence from *Republic,* argue for whether or not Plato would agree with Mengzi that all people have “sprouts” of virtue.

8. How does Mengzi view the concept of fate, and how does his view compare to the notion of fate as developed in *Oedipus the King?* Note that the word for fate is sometimes also translated as “mandate” in the text, so be sure to look at the concept discussed both as “fate” and as “mandate” in *The Essential Mengzi*.

9. As in Plato’s *Republic* (e.g., “The Ring of Gyges”), a visual metaphor is central to Mengzi’s discussion of the virtuous life. For example, King Xuan of Qi spares a sacrificial ox because he “cannot bear its frightened appearance, like an innocent going to the execution ground,” an act Mengzi praises as “a technique for (cultivating your) benevolence” (4-5, 7.3-7-9). Discuss the relationship between vision and virtue in Mengzi. You may also, if you wish, compare this relationship in Mengzi to the connection between vision and virtue in Plato’s *Republic*.